

Leatherhead best of little big hopes for the south

By Norman de Mesquita

"That's what it is all about", is one of those awful phrases that football commentators resort to in moments of stress. The third round of the FA Cup is "all about" the clash of giant and minnow. For five minnows in particular, tomorrow's third round offers an opportunity to make money and/or history. Stafford Rangers and Altrincham in the north; Wycombe Wanderers, Leatherhead and Wimbledon in the south all face Football League opponents, all hoping for a minor miracle but perhaps, deep down, realising that just reaching the third round is as much as they could have hoped for.

Southern hopes are high for Leatherhead of the Rothman's Isthmian League. I saw them beat Colchester United in the second round with a side including three members of last season's Walton & Hersham team that embarrassed Brian Clough's Brighton. Now, of course, it is Peter Taylor's Brighton but who is to say they cannot do it again at the Goldstone ground.

The other Isthmian League side, Wycombe Wanderers, are managed by Brian Lee, one of whose favourite expressions is: "We must not encourage the opposition." One thing that is sure to offer their opponents, Middlesbrough, anything but encouragement is the prospect of playing on a pitch that slopes something like 11 feet from one touchline to the other. The Wycombe players say the slope is worth at least one goal against a side that has never before played at Loakes Park. But this does not stop Lee from saying that his team has no chance against what he describes as "the best organized team in football with the best manager in the game".

The hardest task of the three confronting non-league sides is Wimbledon's tie at Turf Moor. Burnley are among the front runners in the first division (who isn't?) and, although their home

record includes three defeats, this is the sort of game that a non-league side cannot be expected to win.

A round trip of over 200 miles, a night in strange surroundings, and the tensions attached to such a game must surely work against Wimbledon's chances. They are unused to losing, though, and recently had a run of 24 consecutive wins. In the words of Ian Cooke, their captain, Burnley are on a hiding to nothing. It would be dangerous for them to underestimate their Southern League opponents.

Summing up the South's chances in these three ties, I would suggest that logic and form will prevail at Turf Moor; that Brighton will be forced to replay at Leatherhead; and that Wycombe Wanderers, in spite of the views of their own manager, will make it an embarrassing day for Jack Charlton.

Which could also mean more embarrassment for Roger Lee, the Wycombe treasurer. A fortnight ago he had to do his weekend shopping in disguise because of the unprecedented demand for third round tickets. A good fourth round draw could force him into hibernation.

Yesterday's results

Scottish first division

Dundee U (1) 1 St J's stone (0) 1
 Narev Hall

REPRESENTATIVE MATCH: AFA
 Schools XI 0, FA Youth XI 2.

RUGBY UNION: Schoolboys' matches:
 London Welsh 30, Streatham and Croydon 11; Blackheath 12, London Irish 18; Saracens 6, Felbridge 10; Seven-oaks 24, Tonbridge 12.

Today's fixtures

F.A. Cup: Third round

Notts Co v Portsmouth (7.30)

Fourth division

Stockport v Torquay (7.30)

NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE:
 Goole v Buxton (7.30).

RUGBY LEAGUE: Second division:
 Barrow v Whitehaven (7.30).